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SUBJECT: NEW EC DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS, KAREL KOVANDA

¶1. (U) Post offers the following background and biographical information on Karel Kovanda, the current Czech Ambassador at NATO, who was appointed February 9 as European Commission Deputy Director General for External Relations. Kovanda will replace Fernando Velenzuela Marzo. His portfolio will include, inter alia, North American Affairs.

¶2. (U) Kovanda (61) does not have strong ties to the Czech Republic. He is not burdened by the strong sense of nationalism that is found on both sides of the political spectrum within the Czech Republic. He was born in London during WWII, and has spent most of the last 25 years outside the Czech Republic. Kovanda was active in the Czechoslovak student dissident movement in the late sixties. He was president of the National Student Union when that organization was banned in 1969. He fled to the US the following year. America became his adopted homeland. He took an MBA from Pepperdine University and a PhD in Political Science from MIT. He taught political science at a university in California.

¶3. (U) Kovanda has also lived in China. He worked as a consultant for Radio Beijing from 1977-1979.

¶4. (U) Kovanda returned from America to the Czech Republic in 1991 and joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in April of that year. Two years later, in June 1993, he was sent back to the US to become the Czech Permanent Representative at the UN. He held that position until February of 1997. During that time, the Czech Republic was one of the ten non-permanent members of the UN Security Council. Kovanda served as President of the Security Council twice, in January 1994, and again in April of 1995 during the early days of the massacres in Rwanda.

¶5. (U) In the fall of 1997, several months after leaving his post at the UN, he became head of the Czech delegation in Brussels that negotiated NATO accession. In the spring of 1998, the MFA sent him back to Brussels to serve as the Czech Ambassador to NATO and the WEU; he is presently the longest serving ambassador at NATO. One acquaintance predicted that Kovanda, who is 61 as he starts his new position with the European Commission, would finish his career in Brussels.

¶6. (U) Kovanda got into hot water in April, 1999 when, as the Czech Ambassador to NATO, he criticized members of his own government for not supporting the NATO air strikes in Yugoslavia. Current President Vaclav Klaus was then head of the Chamber of Deputies, the main legislative body, and voiced strong reservations about the NATO actions. Kovanda's statements led to charges that he was disloyal and even to calls for his dismissal.

¶7. (U) In light of the years Kovanda spent in the US, it is not surprising that his views towards America are fairly sympathetic. A speech Kovanda gave in Paris in December of 2003 gives a good exposition of his views on the US and its transatlantic role (full text at [www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/kovanda\\_dec03.html](http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/kovanda_dec03.html)). In the speech, Kovanda defends the US invasion of Iraq. He said the Czechs supported the US "because of our belief that it stood on the right side of the issue; because of our belief that the Saddam regime was so awful that if someone was ready to take it out, we, with our own historical experiences with totalitarian dictatorships, could not be against it"

¶8. (U) In the same speech, Kovanda defended the American idealism that some Europeans find naive: "We detect a strand of idealism in US foreign policy which appeals to us; for better or worse, President Masaryk's country - our own - was founded on the strength of Wilsonian idealism, back in 1918. It is an idealism dedicated to freedom and democracy; an idealism that might be a little less tempered by pragmatic, say economic concerns that, we fear, motivate from time to time foreign policies of some European powers."

¶9. (SBU) At a NATO event in Colorado Springs in 2003, Kovanda showed his own idealism when he refused to have anything to do with the Russian delegation. He left the facility for a walk in the hills in order to avoid meeting the Russians.

¶10. (SBU) Although he is generally favorably inclined to US

positions, at least on transatlantic issues, Americans who have worked with Kovanda have found him a difficult individual at times. he can be engaging when he chooses to be. Professorial and prima donna were two of the descriptions used by acquaintances.

11.(U) Kovanda is eloquent in English, fluent in French and Spanish, and functional in Russian and German. Languages are one of his hobbies. His second wife, Noemi, is a native Slovak.

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